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Adding Tools to the Open Source Toolbox: The Internet

Presentation Summary

Introduction

When Tom Clancy wrote the Hunt For Red October, many members of the military and intelligence communities wondered how he had gotten so many of the details correct. Clancy responded that in addition to interviewing ex-Navy nukes, he'd pieced together information about submarine systems from publicly available materials such as articles from the Washington Post and Aviation Week and Space Technology. Open source information has become even more accessible with advancing technology and high speed networks like the Internet.

Sources: Washington Post. 01/29/85, p. C01
Strategy in Fiction. speech by Tom Clancy at the MITRE Corporation - 1988 MITRE Distinguished Lecturer Series

The Internet offers researchers additional sources of information not easily available from traditional sources such as print volumes or commercial databases. Internet tools such as email and ftp speed up the way researchers communicate and transmit data. Mosaic, one of the newest additions to the Internet toolbox, allows users to combine tools such as ftp (file transfer protocol), gopher, WAIS (Wide Area Information Server), and WWW (World Wide Web) with multimedia capabilities. Mosaic has quickly become a popular means of making information available on the Internet because it is versatile and easily customizable.

What's In It For Me?

Many universities, governments, societies, and companies found a distribution point for their information on the Internet. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), for example, offers a number of its popular resources through gopher, ftp, and mosaic, including shuttle information, program descriptions, astronaut biographies, and images of the Shoemaker-Levy comets' impact on Jupiter. The Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) has made financial information like 10Ks and other SEC filings from publicly-traded companies available through it's the EDGAR database. In an effort to consolidate federal resources, a site called FedWorld serves as a launching point for locating government information.

Sites: http://hypatia.gsfc.nasa.gov/NASA_homepage.html
<http://town.hall.org/edgar/edgar.html>
<http://www.fedworld.gov>

The Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (CARL) provides wonderful resources for Internet researchers through its REVEAL and UNCOVER services. The UNCOVER database provides tables of contents and searchable article titles for journals in a variety of subject areas. REVEAL is the mechanism for setting up email-based current awareness services for new issues of journals. The database and REVEAL service are free and provide access to UNCOVER, the article delivery service offered by CARL.

Sites: database.carl.org
pac.carl.org

How To Find Sources

A number of attempts have been made to produce meta-indexes of Internet information. Recent versions of the Mosaic software have the Meta-Index option under the Navigate Window. One excellent finding aid is the Clearinghouse for Subject-Oriented Internet Resource Guides at the University of Michigan. Pathfinders are produced by volunteers in their subject area and posted at the site for the world to use. The resource lists point researchers to web sites, gophers, and other Internet sources for information. Another subject listing for the Internet can be found at CERN. CERN also offers a listing of WWW sites by country, which can be an invaluable resource to those just beginning to examine Internet resources in specific geographic areas.

Sites: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/chhome.html>
<http://info.cern.ch/hypertext/DataSources/bySubject/Overview.html>
<http://info.cern.ch/hypertext/DataSources/WWW/Servers.html>

Keeping Up With New Sources

The challenge of effectively using the Internet for research is trying to keep up with what's out there. The National Center for Supercomputing Application's (NCSA's) Starting Points includes a What's New page that's worth browsing once a week for new items of interest. Another resource for finding new resources on a certain topic are newsgroups or listservs where contributors often submit tidbits about new sites. Many journals such as Technology Transfer Business or Library Journal also offer an information page or regular column on Internet items of interest.

Site: <http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/Mosaic/Docs/whats-new.html>

Non-Internet Sources

The Internet, while an excellent tool for research, does not offer a comprehensive search for open source literature. A number of commercial databases and gateways offer valuable, international open source information. Dialog, Nexis, Newsnet, DataStar, and Datatimes all include foreign source

information such as China Daily, Nikkei Weekly, Africa Intelligence Report, and Kompass Europe. The information offered in these databases can be invaluable to a researcher and should not be ignored simply because the data costs money.

Tailoring Your Research

A comprehensive search of open source literature might be one along the following lines: a researcher would begin by consulting the Internet for free or unusual information. Bookmarks and Hotlists would be built so that relevant sites can be revisited with minimal effort. A search of the Internet would include browsing subject-relevant sites as well as searching CARL's UNCOVER for articles. The researcher could set up a REVEAL to help her stay aware of the happenings in her field of research. Perhaps the researcher would search the archives of listservs or newsgroups in the subject field to find names of contacts or other interesting sites to browse. Thus armed with keywords, organizations, and potential authors, a researcher could then select the commercial gateways and databases offering the best coverage of her topic. Dial-up bulletin boards would also be browsed for information. Upon completing all of this research, the searcher would write up a report of the methodology (as a reminder to herself), analyze the information, and submit the findings via email to the client.

Conclusion

The Internet offers researchers an additional tool for finding open source information and should be used to supplement current retrieval tools being used to gather data. Ignoring the Internet, print sources, or commercial databases places a researcher at risk of missing vital information. No one source, not even the much-touted Information Superhighway, can offer it all. Effective researchers learn to use multiple sources and media to glean the best information.

About the Speaker

Raised in Richmond, Virginia, Ms. Porth graduated from the University of Virginia in 1989 with a Bachelor of Arts in History. In August 1991, she received her MLIS from the University of Texas. While attending classes at the University of Texas, Ms. Porth did online searching and electronic reference in her position as assistant librarian at Advanced Micro Devices Incorporated.

Ms. Porth became a Reference Librarian at the NASA Headquarters Library in September 1991. She initiated the library's access to the Internet in June 1992 and began training staff on Internet resources shortly thereafter. In June 1993, Ms. Porth became Head of Reference at NASA. She left NASA to take the position of Information Analyst at the MITRE Corporation in June 1994.

Ms. Porth has participated in numerous roundtables and workshops discussing the effective use of Internet resources. She is a founding member of the Internet Users Group at NASA. She has helped members of the NASA and MITRE communities make full use of their Internet access by teaching subject-oriented classes emphasizing what can be found on the Internet.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in financial reporting.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods and techniques used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed description of the experimental procedures and the tools used for data collection.

3. The third part of the document presents the results of the study, including a comparison of the different methods and techniques used. It discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each method and provides a summary of the findings.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the implications of the study and provides recommendations for future research. It highlights the need for further investigation into the effectiveness of the different methods and techniques used.

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